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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, March 19, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NOTES FOR GARDENERS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Since March is garden-planning month in so many parts of the country, the news I have collected for you today is for the attention of all garden-minded listeners. Some of these items may offer ideas for your garden.

First some news about the size of the family vegetable garden. Mr. W. R. Beattie, radio garden adviser for the Department of Agriculture, says that a half-acre garden -- a plot 220 by 100 feet -- can produce all the vegetables the average family of four or five needs for its year's supply. A half-acre can supply all the vegetables the family can use throughout the growing season and plenty also for canning, storing or drying.

But this half-acre garden naturally does not allow for vegetables that take up a good deal of space in growing as, for example, sweet corn and potatoes, pumpkin and squash.

"Of course," says Mr. Beattie, "a good deal depends on how the gardener works his plot. You might plant peas in one-tenth of the space, that is, 3 full-length rows. That will give plenty of fresh peas for the table while they are in season and also a fair supply for canning. Peas are an early crop. They need planting and gathering before the hot weather. Just as soon as the peas are off, set about 100 tomato plants on this ground. These will supply tomatoes for late summer and for canning. But elsewhere in the garden you will also have a row of very early tomatoes for table use."

As for the value of this half-acre garden, if you are interested in putting it on a dollars and cents basis, the Department of Agriculture makes a conservative estimate that the vegetables a good home gardener can grow on a half-acre may be worth 250 to 300 dollars a year to the family. Whether you save much money by growing your own or not, you still are sure of getting two other big advantages from a home garden. Your summer meals will be more delicious because those absolutely fresh vegetables right out of the garden have much more flavor and tenderness than those that lie around in the grocery before you buy them. Then, your garden will give you at minimum cost an abundance of those protective foods which the nutritionists say most Americans need more of.

As for the vegetables you will grow in your garden, that will depend partly on where you live. Gardeners up North have the custom of putting in spinach and beets for greens while those in the South are more likely to depend on turnip-tops and mustard for greens. But the boundary lines of many vegetables can be extended and give more variety in the menu. Some of the popular southern crops will do well in northern gardens. For example, black-eyed peas can be grown farther north. They will do well all over the country as far north as Michigan with the exception of dry desert areas. They have a high yield, are excellent fresh or dried, and are good for the soil they grow in.

Then, that typically southern green vegetable, okra, which is the making of that famous "slippery" dish known as "gumbo" -- okra can grow as far north as southern New York and Michigan. Green okra is delicious fresh. Or you can can it in soup mixtures. Or you can dry it. Some clever gardeners grow okra and tomatoes side by side in the garden and then can them together for soup.

Speaking of greens, have you ever tried cabbage greens? Market gardeners in some regions are using the thinnings of their early cabbage to sell as greens. As soon as kale is off the market, they cut the young early cabbage before it is fully headed, and sell it as greens. These greens thin out the cabbage patch and leave plenty of the plants to head. The young cabbage is particularly good when cut in narrow strips and pan-fried -- that is, heated in a covered pan with a little fat until the cabbage is barely tender but has lost little or none of its fresh color.

Collards are a popular member of the cabbage family in the South. And with good reason. Collards are hardy and will grow all through the fall and early winter.

Here is a question that frequently comes to the Department of Agriculture "Where can an amateur gardener go for advice on gardening?"

That question calls for several good answers. Every agricultural college in the United States now publishes information on gardening in the form of bulletins or leaflets. And these publications are free to the citizens of the State. So your first move in planning a garden is to write to your own State college for information. In recent years, most State colleges with the help of the extension staff, have worked out charts showing what vegetables and how many of each a home garden should grow to supply families of different sizes. These charts allow for canning, storing and drying. And they provide amply for all the different foods needed to keep the family in good health the year around.

The Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., also has bulletins to aid the home gardener. One of these is "The Farm Garden" -- Farmers' Bulletin No. 1673. Another is "Subsistence Farm Gardens", Farmers' Bulletin No. 1746. Still another is "The City Home Garden" -- No. 1044, for people with only a small garden space. Finally, you can include in your garden library Farmers' Bulletin No. 1371 -- "Diseases and Insects of Garden Vegetables." You are welcome to any of these bulletins as long as the free supply lasts. Just write a postcard to the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., and ask for a copy.

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